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“WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEAM?”

Following the example of Sport Teams

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WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEAM?

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Abstract

Given the incontestable importance of knowing to work in teams within contemporary organizations, a need for greater understanding of group dynamics and what should be a real team arises. Through the study of five sports teams, this project found four essential factors that constitute a solid base for the success of any team: Effective Leadership, Organizational Support, Strong Positive Relationships and Real Commitment to the team objectives.

Key words: Teamwork, Leadership, Commitment, Relationships, Organization

I. Introduction

"Teams are everywhere!" (LaFasto and Larson, 2001) This is an undeniable fact. In recent decades there has been a change on mentalities and habits that contributed to a transformation process from an individualistic working approach into an increasingly collective organizational spirit. Everyone, at certain point in life, passes through a team working experience, whether at school, in sport, cultural or religious activities, in the college or in the labor market. Nowadays, those that are not able to work in teams are somehow outside the new organization models. Many authors even state that the business

world is currently in the "*Age of Groupism*", where the individual success is defined by the success of his team (Locke et al., 2001).

The solitary geniuses of the past are becoming rare; in their places appear groups of researchers and scientists, without any name in particular that shines by itself (Larson and LaFasto, 1989). But why team work is so important? Why is so crucial to work as a team? The simplest answers are words such as complexity and competitiveness. On one hand, the growing complexity of our world requires a constant sharing of knowledge and experiences. It is irrefutable that a group of people can cover a set of knowledge more diverse than one person, especially when it joins experts in different areas, able to solve unthinkable problems through the cooperation. On the other hand, in a competitive society it is essential to have sufficient flexibility to keep up the rapid changes that take place at every moment; flexibility that can be more easily found in a heterogeneous group, where reigns the diversity of opinions and knowledge, essential to overcome obstacles, promoting at the same time greater creativity and innovation in the solutions.

For all these reasons, nothing more relevant than study the subject of teamwork and group dynamics in order to clarify the path a team should follow in order to succeed, never forgetting that each case is unique and that "*the same paths do not always reach the same purpose*" (Jean Jacques Rousseau). Understand what should be teamwork and what features make the difference between a real team and a working group is crucial for a better integration and adaptation of an individual within a team.

The main objective of this project is to find and analyze the key factors and the most common features that lead teams to be successful. This study will take as a starting point sports teams, whose dynamics has aroused the interest of the more varied types of organizations because its simplicity as example of a combination of attributes and efforts

around common goals. In sport teams the adage “*the whole is greater than the sum of the parts*” becomes more real (Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Moreover, after family the sport team is the group that exercises the major influence in an individual throughout his life.

It is also important to note that sport is increasingly a business that each year moves billions of Euros: clubs that disbursed fortunes to hire players; big brands that invest huge sums of money to sponsor teams, athletes or sport events; large companies’ advertisements with the face of sports’ stars. Actually, it is impossible to pass along this business side that sports have developed (Frey and Eitzen, 1991). Therefore, why not take advantage of their high visibility and use the dynamics of sports teams as an example to the business teams? Like business, sport is an activity more and more competitive, more demanding and more global; both concern the need to compete externally and the need to cooperate internally (Katz, 2001). According to *Tomaz Morais*, coach of the Portuguese national team of Rugby, sport is a good example for everything: “*People have to train and compete, have to be with each other and have to depend on each other, which give them a concrete preparation for life.*”

This study focuses on Portuguese’s successful teams of 4 different sports: Futsal, Cycling, Rugby and Volleyball. In each one, athletes and the coaches of the teams that have shown better results in the last years were interviewed. The questions focused on what is the experience gained by each interviewee over the many years of teamwork and his individual opinion about what is a real team, what are the main success factors and strengths of the team being analyzed. The aim is actually to find out *what makes a good team!*

Following, in Section II it will be presented a brief summary of all the literature that inspired this study, while Section III is intended to detail all the steps taken in the field work. The results will be described and analyzed in Section IV and V, respectively.

II. Literature review

Firstly, it is important to realize what a team is in fact. Many definitions have emerged over the decades around this issue, and common point among most of them is the distinction between group and team. A team will always be a group of people, however not all groups of people working together can be considered a team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). A team is often defined as a more restricted and demanding group, which require the sharing of a common goal, interdependent and dynamic interactions among its elements (Swezey and Salas, 1992), complementary skills (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993) and an effective coordination around the achievement of the team objective (Larson and LaFasto, 1989).

Despite Katzenbach and Smith (1993) have defined the team as a small group of people, arguing that with a high number of elements the likelihood to form subgroups is larger, often sport teams with 15 (Volleyball, Basketball) or even 25 elements (Football, Rugby) are considered real teams.

The concept of *Sport Teams* ends up being more specific than the normal definition of team. In addition to having a common goal, the sport teams are characterized by sharing a common identity and a common destiny (win or lose); have structured forms of interaction and communication; are prone to greater interpersonal attraction among its members (friendship is a common feeling); and there is a great interdependence and complementarity since no team member alone can play a game of football, basketball or volleyball for instance (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998).

There are several features of sports teams that have been mentioned in the literature; it will be highlighted three that are more interesting and useful considering the objectives of this study. First of all, the existence of a common identity comes from the sense of belonging to

the group; it is the perspective of "us" against "them" during the competition (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). Secondly, the sport teams show that there can be competition between peers, without adversely affecting the performance of the team. Ideally it is important to find the right balance between cooperation and competitiveness; between mutual support and the will to individually improve in order to overcome the internal competitor, helping to strengthen the team (Katz, 2001). Lastly, another fundamental aspect that can be better understood by looking at several examples that come from sports is team cohesion. The level of cohesion of a team reflects the extent to which an individual identifies with the group he belongs to (Karau and Williams, 2001): it is viscerally connected with the objectives of the team and the factors that influence the construction and maintenance of strong and positive relationships among all team members (Yukelson et al., 1984); also reflects the ability of a group to stay together (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998).

As a final point, three concepts which in general are intrinsically linked to the success of any team will be emphasized: Leadership, Communication, and Motivation.

Be the leader of a group should mean *bringing people together* (LaFasto and Larson, 2001). The leader should clearly define the goals of the team and provide the necessary conditions for building relationships based on trust and cooperation (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). An effective leader must be concerned not only with the needs of the organization to which he belongs but also to ensure the satisfaction of their subordinates with regard to their personal aspirations: “*when team members are satisfied and the team is successful*”, the leader is considered to be an effective leader (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). Notwithstanding these general guidelines, the renowned *Contingency Theory* tells us that a leader must have the capacity to adapt depending on the nature of each occasion (Fielder and Chemers, 1974).

Regarding communication, it is proven that is directly influenced by the diversity of personalities (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). One of the key factors for effective communication is openness. Individuals who are open easily hear the colleagues, exchange ideas and discuss solutions (LaFasto and Larson, 2001). Very important is the creation of opportunities for socialization, moments in which people can know each other better, because it will allow better communication among all (Yukelson, 1993).

The behavior of a person within a group is closely linked to their personal needs and their level of motivation (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). One of the possible definitions tells us that motivation is the “*direction and intensity of effort*” (Sage, 1977). Several authors believe that the individual motivation is one of the most important factors that define the performance of an organization (Cunha et al., 2004).

III. Methodology

Since the basis of this study are sport teams, the first step was decide on which sports and teams would be more suitable to the objectives set. In every sports more known to the general public were defined the teams that have shown better results, combined with a visible tradition in terms of national sport and a strong organizational culture. Then, it was extremely important to take into account the possibilities to contact each one and the availability of the team itself to cooperate with this project. Thus, the sample was reduced to 5 teams belonging to 4 different sports – Futsal (2), Rugby, Volleyball, and Cycling – (please see [Appendix 2](#) – Teams’ Profiles).

The data was collected through 30 in-depth and semi-structured interviews in order to

easily gather the perceptions and opinions of the individuals (please see [Appendix 1- Interview Guide](#)). The interviews focused on 4 main themes - Team, Leadership, Interactions and Individual Motivations – however they were being adapted according to the reality of each team and the experience of each interviewee.

In each team were interviewed 5 players and 1 coach – overall were interviewed 25 athletes and 5 coaches. The initial idea was intended to collect information from athletes only, but coaches end up being interviewed because their perceptions about the group and the leadership style exercised could be elements very enriching for the study.

The athletes interviewed are on average 29 years old and they were selected with the purpose of building a diverse and heterogeneous sample (please see [Appendix 3 - Research Participants' Profiles](#)). For instance, respondents were not only athletes with many years of experience, it was also important to gather how younger athletes see the team. There was also concern to select athletes that belong to the team for more years and others that were recently integrated (in these cases it was interesting to get an opinion about what they found and how they were received). In short, were considered factors such as the number of years competing and years in the club, role performed, curriculum and status.

The interviews lasted on average 15 minutes and were integrally transcribed so that the raw data could be evaluated. Each interview was qualitatively analyzed in terms of its content and coded in order to find emerging patterns. Most interviewees were Portuguese and so the interviews were conducted in their mother tongue. An identification code for all interviewees was made (please see [Appendix 4](#)) and will be used to report the quotes in the text.

IV.

Results

It will be presented first the main characteristics and strengths of each team and then the similarities among teams regarding the key success factors.

Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira (CCT)

Contrary to what most people think, cycling is a sport where teamwork is essential. A study of Norman Triplett (1897) proved that run in group benefits the performance of cyclists. Simultaneous, this sport implies a huge autonomy of each cyclist: *"we do not train together with a coach supervising. We must have very high levels of motivation and dedication so that each one could meet the respective training plan"* (25, CCT).

The CCT was always seen as a modest team, however in recent years has become one of the best in Portugal. The explanation was unanimous: *"there were changes of mentality, more ambition, new ideas, plus the existing experience made the team grow"* (34, CCT).

The CCT is described as *"a team with very strong roots"* (35, CCT). Over the years the directive board has tried to maintain a stable group, *"where exist a very strong cohesion; it could enter a cyclist with another mentality but he will have to adapt to the team's culture"* (35, CCT). Another strength of the team is that everyone knows *"what is his value and his role within the group"* (34, CCT) combining the fact that they are also *"very loyal and dedicated in terms of work, will to train and to improve"* (34, CCT).

Belenenses Futsal (FCB)

Futsal is characterized by a high degree of reciprocal interdependence, which requires a high level of cohesion between players during the games. For the players of Belenenses one

of the main reasons for a team to succeed is the existence of strong relationships because “*the better the relationships, more cohesive the players will be on the pitch*” (C, FCB).

The players interviewed believe that found in *Belenenses* what is “*a real team: we are all very cohesive, we are almost like a family, always available to help each other*” (25, FCB).

According to the data collected there is high respect among team members: “*everyone knows the place of each one, and nobody wants to stand*” (29, FCB); moreover also seek to maintain open relations where each one is “*willing to hear anyone*” (25, FCB).

During the interviews also stood a great “*desire to make history in Belenenses*” (25, FCB), often the athletes referred “*the ambition to win things for the team*” (26, FCB) and the fact that they are all in the team for “*pleasure, not obligation*” (26, FCB).

Seleção Nacional de Rugby (SNR)

The national team players see rugby as a sport of “organized combat” where the organization, cooperation and sacrifice are crucial to the teams’ success.

The motto of this team is “*believe in the impossible*” (31, SNR). All players share a great ambition, considering that “*the more difficult the mission the greater the cohesion and the desire to overcome hurdles*” (27, SNR).

For most the greatest strength of the team is the solid friendship that unites them: “*we all know each other very well, we are a very cohesive group. We are not together only during the practices or games, outside too often we spend time together*” (26, SNR). Nevertheless, there is also a general consciousness that friendship and cohesion in itself are not enough to win games. A few years ago they were “*a cohesive team but, for being a team of amateurs, did not have certain elementary principles*” (26, SNR). Today, are guided by 3 fundamental

rules transmitted during the days of training in the army: *"accuracy in schedules, accuracy in equipments and accuracy in hierarchies"* (26, SNR).

Benfica Futsal (SLB)

A team of *"true champions"* (32, SLB); this is how the futsal players of Benfica define themselves. When asked what motivates a team accustomed to win everything, the answer could not be more enlightening: *"We do not get tired of winning, and whoever wins knows how good is to win"* (37, SLB). Ambition is a uniqueness of the team; most of players also stressed the *"tremendous spirit of conquest that has made the difference"* (31, SLB).

Another interesting aspect of this team is that *"in critical moments, those when they cannot fail, they become much more cohesive and able to overcome everything"* (C, SLB).

In addition to what was mentioned above, *Benfica* revealed as a highly goal-oriented team in which the most important is the cohesion *"around the team's objectives"* (F, 27, SLB).

Sporting de Espinho Voleibol (SCE)

In *Espinho* it was possible to find a team that fosters a huge *"passion for the game"* (32, SCE). Perhaps, this is the volleyball team within the usual *"title's candidates with the lower budget"* (38, SCE) however players consider that they are the most cohesive and those that every day they work with *"a clear objective in mind: win the next game"* (26, SCE).

The interviewees say that *Espinho* is a special team, with *"very strong values that are perfectly transmitted to the athletes. The will to win and the determination are things that each player feels when arrives here"* (29, SCE).

A hallmark of this team is the strong social relationships established between individuals, *"no matters who comes, the relations extra-training and extra game will always be present"*

(29, SCE). In the opinion of the athletes *"the team has gained many titles over the years because it works as a family"* (32, SCE).

Described the main features of these five high-performance teams it is time to know what they have in common. The question was clear: "what are the key factors for a team to succeed?" The responses varied from team to team, which is understandable since each one is inserted in a different context as well as they have their own history and culture. Nevertheless, overall, there were four factors that were particularly highlighted: Leadership, Club's support, and Social Environment, Commitment to the team.

Leadership

In any type of team being leader is probably the most important role, or at least the most interrelated with group performance (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). When talking about leadership in sports teams usually the following doubt arises: coach or captain? It was precisely what happened in the teams interviewed.

Often, the coach was defined as *"the head of the team, the person that defines the strategy"* (26, SNR), while the captain is *"the eyes that are within the team and that should know everything that is happening"* (25, FCB). *"It is the coach who guides us in the right direction. But we must not forget that he cannot play"* (31, SNR), during the game *"will be the captain to take the command of the team"* (27, SNR). Both must have the ability *"to do everything to motivate and unite the team"* (28, FCB), and it is very important that they are seen as an example: *"The leader must be the first to arrive, the first to act when things go wrong and the first to show what is the right way"* (26, SNR).

Despite the relevance of the captain's role, this section will give primacy to the role of the coach as team leader.

Several times the athletes interviewed focused on the growing need for a coach to have much more than the usual technical knowledge. In high competition sports the coach *"should be a good manager of men, he must know how to work the minds of athletes"* (29, SCE), because a player who integrates a professional team already had many years of training in youth squads that privilege the technique. Even the coaches recognize this need: *"We need more knowledge, a diversified knowledge in supplementary subjects such as management or psychology"* (C, SCE); *"the ideal coach must be able to gather the best abilities, not only at a tactical level, but also in subjects such psychology, leadership and team's management during the game"* (C, SLB).

Another interesting fact is directly related to the *Life-cycle Theory of Leadership* (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). According to this theory there are four leadership styles: Telling, Selling, Participating and Delegating. During the interviews it was possible to notice that there is not a clear preference for any of these styles. Each one will be the most appropriate depending on the situation: *"For a player it is good when he can express its opinion. But sometimes it is necessary be less flexible, especially in those moments of greatest tension in which a fast and effective solution is needed"* (32, SLB).

On the one hand the coach should be able to *"assume the role of mentor finding solutions where players do not see"* (37, SLB). Some interviewees emphasized the fact athletes like to feel that there is someone able to show them the best path when it is required: *"If the coach does not have the capacity to organize us in the best manner the team could be split up"* (35, CCT). On the other hand, there are also situations in which the leader should adopt a participating style *"debating with the players every chances to finding the one that best*

serves the team" (29, SCE), and moments that call for persuasiveness (*selling*): *"is very important to captivate the players and make them understand what they must do and how to do it"* (27, SCE).

From what has been said it is reasonable that a coach has to effectively communicate and motivate, and many times communicate means motivate. *"If a coach cannot communicate, if cannot convey the message, it becomes very difficult to achieve success"* (C, SLB), he must therefore have a *"special vocation to say the right things at the right moment because it is through words that can exploit the best of each athlete"* (26, SNR). For example, during the competition *"the strategy may be the best, but how the message is transmitted"* (35, CCT) can lead to team's failure. However, it is imperative to state that a coach does not have to be always pleasant, essential is to be *"consistent and fair"* (27, SCE), he should know *"welcome and critique at the right time"* (25, CCT). The key is to make the athletes *"believe they are the best, but still have to work a lot to achieve the goals set"* (27, SNR).

Club's Support

The working conditions that each club can offer to their teams are also one of the key success factors most cited in interviews: *"A true team always foresees a good structure to support the athletes, and this requires good organization and logistics"* (27, SCE).

In cycling, for example, the quality of a team's work is very reliant on *"competence and organization of the support"* (C, CCT) given to the athletes during the competition, and that presupposes the existence of *"several elements that make the team work, from masseurs, doctors, mechanics, public relations, and coaches"* (C, CCT).

In general, the success of a team depends on a balanced structure of *"athletes, coaches, support staff, equipment, infrastructure and all necessary means to develop a good work"* (35, CCT). Some of those interviewed say that, inside the respective sport, their clubs have *"the best working conditions in Portugal"* (C, SLB)

All conditions that are provided to the teams have a large influence on the satisfaction and motivation of each player: *"the athletes like to feel cherished; if a transport, a meal or a payment fail, if they feel the people are being ungrateful with their effort because they do not comply with what was set, the team will be negatively affected"* (C, SCE).

Sometimes, more important than material or financial support is the support in psychological terms. Most athletes referred this, noting that the directive board of the club gives them *"great encouragement and has in consideration, not only the professional life, but also the personal life of each athlete"* (25, FCB). Thus, a close link between who govern and who tries to achieve sporting success is a factor that positively influences the attitude of the players in relation to the club and their motivational level: *"the fact of being compensated and valued, and people feel proud of our work make us believe that we are keystone within the team's strategy"* (34, CCT).

Social Environment

The social environment of a team, not being a direct cause of success, is a factor of great importance, especially in sports teams: *"The friendship is not all, but it is a good piece of any team's success"* (32, SCE).

All teams studied have in common the existence of strong positive relationships between athletes. In Espinho, for instance, there are several traditions: *"people who come to this team know that will find certain habits. It is football games and dinners on Tuesdays, the*

special reception of new players...all this strengthens the team spirit" (32, SCE). Also in Rugby National Team athletes highlight all the non-competition activities as important so that all team members know each other better, because *"outside of working hours people let themselves go and show more of what they are"* (27, SNR).

In general, the interviews showed that athletes like to work *"with people who can call friends"* (29, FCB), since it *"facilitates communication, sharing ideas and experiences, and also promotes the existence of sincerity and loyalty"* (29, SCE). Furthermore, in groups of friends when difficulties or quarrels arise *"soon everything is solved"* (29, FCB).

The existence of positive and relaxed relationships *"favors group cohesion"* (C, FCB), and helps *"to avoid the pressure of competition"* (25, CCT), especially during the stages in which athletes are forced to live together during consecutive days. Yet everyone must know the difference between the moments of relaxation and those in which work is needed, *"it is prohibited to confuse friendship with professional sense"* (C, SNR) and *"when it is time to work there must be seriousness and responsibility"* (34, CCT).

A pertinent question arises concerning the authenticity of the relationships within a team. Athletes often spoke in *"true friendship"*, but it is common sense the inherent difficulty of the human being to build authentic friendships. In fact the most cautious indicated that more important than being friends, there must be *"confidence and mutual respect"* (27, SCE), because in the pitch all are *"equal and cannot exist distinctions between those who are more or less friends"* (32, SLB).

Two values must be present in any type of team: *"Respect that is earned on day-to-day actions and attitudes, and a sense of sharing - give first to receive later."* (C, SNR)

Commitment to the team

Buchanan (1974) defined commitment as the affective linkage between a person and the goals and values of the organization to which he/she belongs. Concerning team commitment, it can be viewed as the potential for a team to stay together. From research it was found that team-membership is more stable when people are more committed with their team (e.g., Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Some authors still state that team commitment is “team spirit” (Larson and LaFasto, 1989).

Therefore, in all the teams interviewed was noticeable a tremendous team spirit, which means that exist a high level of team commitment. Team spirit is *“something invisible, something that can be felt, that can be shared, but can never be evaluated. It is based on a strong commitment to the group’s rules and values without which a team cannot live”* (C, SNR). Furthermore, team spirit means that *“everyone thinks in the team and thinks in the same objectives; it means helping each other and cohesion”* (25, FCB).

Somewhat, all these aspects were mentioned during the interviews. Athletes showed a great belief in the team and its objectives: *“my ambitions are the ambitions of the team”* (26, FCB). They demonstrated high satisfaction and well-being for belonging to the team: *“this team is like a second family to me”* (26, CCT). And proved that one key success factor is the commitment to the team: *“much of the success of the team is to be a group of players very closed; there is not much interaction with outside elements. The focus is on the group, and is the group that is always in first place”* (29, SCE).

Since a strong team spirit is positively related to the team performance, how can it be strengthened? According to Larson and LaFasto (1989), people recognize when there is no team spirit, but when exist become very hard to say exactly what it is. Nevertheless, it was possible to gather from the interviews that to have a strong team spirit it is essential the

existence of “*good relationships*” (34, CCT) and “*attainable but not easy objectives, because an easy goal is quickly reached and does not motivate so much*” (27, SNR). Then, “*win games*” (25, FCB) are also essentially for both, motivation and team spirit.

V. Discussion

What makes a good team? This was the main research question for this work project. Results suggest that sport teams to achieve success should have an effective leadership, true support from their clubs, healthy and sincere relationships among their members, and strong commitment of each individual. To sum up, the key success factors of sport teams can be divided into 4 levels: Organization, Leadership, Interactions and Individual.

Imagine a large multinational, an organization spread over several countries around the world. Each of the national units enjoys a certain degree of autonomy and independence, but the outlines of the strategy are defined at the organizational level. The same happens in sports, whit that large multinational being seen as a perfect analogy for a sport club. The teams analyzed in this study are only a small part inside great and historical institutions such as Benfica, Belenenses or Sporting de Espinho. As a multinational company operates in several countries, these clubs are eclectic - they have teams in a wide range of sports. Importantly, even being a small part of the club, no team can be forgotten.

As results mentioned, the club's support is one of the most important boosters for the athletes' satisfaction because athletes like to feel important regarding the materialization of the organizational strategy.

The club cannot influence the daily life of each team “simply” defining the core values and rules by which they should behave and providing them material and financial conditions so that they can develop a good work. It is essential that top management also influence the motivation of the group showing respect and consideration, and conveying to each team the uniqueness of their value within the organization. After all, it is the combination of the results obtained by all the teams that define the club’s image.

Concerning the teams’ leadership, it seems to be proven that there is no specific style of leadership that would be the ideal. Above all, teams are conscious that they need a leader; a leader who, according to *Contingency Theory* (Fielder and Chemers, 1974), has the ability to shape his leadership style according to the requirements of each moment. For example, being advisor when the team lost the plotted course; hard when athletes show laziness; or motivator after an adversity. Nonetheless, as the main function of a leader is to hold the team cohesive, if the coach does not have the talent to make the athletes focused on the objectives, surely he is not the ideal coach for the team.

Looking at the results it was also confirmed that it is beneficial to the teams’ performance whether the leader is consistent, can convey the message clearly and unequivocally, and demonstrates clairvoyance in the sense that he knows perfectly what he is doing.

Since who makes the difference between the success and failure of a team are the athletes is imperative to talk about individual motivations and interactions between athletes.

First of all, an athlete must give up some of his individuality for the sake of the team, but that individuality can never be completely ignored, neither by the athlete himself nor the other team members, including the leader. If it is true that the team is above everything, it is

also true the fact that the level of effort and committal of each athlete depends on his personal will and motivation. An individual dissatisfied and unmotivated is enough to absolutely destabilize a group. Thus, motivating a team should always begin from the motivation of each athlete in its individuality, leading each one to become aware of its significance inside the team, and physic and mentally available to work toward the team.

From theory it is known that the sports teams involve a social dimension stronger than any team whose members work 8 hours a day in a closed and impersonal office (Gzowski, 1981). In sport there is a vast combination of extreme environments: from the stress of competition to the relaxation of the final moments of training; from the happiness of a victory to the sadness of a defeat. Together athletes experience a huge variety of feelings; they are more exposed emotionally, and therefore are more likely to be more authentic regarding what each one shows about himself as well as in terms of the established relationships. The results of the interviews confirmed this trend. This does not mean that a team to succeed needs optimal relationships among their members, but in the case of sports teams that aspect really presents itself as one of the most relevant.

In a sport competition there can be only one winner and rarely wins the team that simply has the best individual values. This study shows that in most cases the teams who reach the highest sustained success has a perfect blend of all factors referred above. Besides, it is credible that the same occurs in any other organization: hire the best do not seems to be enough. There must be guidance, unconditional support, respect and trust, and a great will and dedication at an individual level.

Table I summarizes the key success factors mentioned by the teams studied in this project.

Key Success Factor	Explanation	Example	Important Features
Leadership	All teams need effective leadership, able of setting goals and the most appropriate strategy to achieve them.	<i>"It is the coach who guides us and leads us in the right direction."</i> (31, SNR)	Clear communication Real fairness Absolute coherence
Club's Support	As one of the major sources of athletes' satisfaction, the club must provide financial, material and emotional support.	<i>"There should be a structure to support cyclists working perfectly"</i> (26, CCT)	Genuine Concern Keeping promises
Social Environment	In sport the relations created between the athletes are a crucial factor in the definition of a team cohesion level.	<i>"Group spirit always starts from the existence of mutual respect."</i> (29, FCB)	Mutual respect Mutual trust Unreserved loyalty
Commitment	No team is successful if there is not an absolute focus of all its members around the proposed objectives.	<i>"In a true team must exist a defined target and everyone has to row in that direction"</i> (39, SCE)	Goal-Oriented Cohesiveness

Figure 1: Key success factors

VI. Conclusion

The findings of this research contribute to a better understanding of group dynamics in sport teams.

In a field that has been so exploited in recent years due to its great importance, this project has been successful in clarifying the most important factors that lead a team to succeed. Not forgetting the particularities of each case, the issues that justify more consideration when the intention is to build a successful team are: Leadership, Organizational Support, Social Environmental, and Individual Commitment. These findings are consistent with general teamwork theory (e.g.: La Fast and Larson, 2001). However, when the subject is sport

teams usually the higher attention is given to leadership and team cohesion topics (e.g.: Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). This study confirms its tremendous value, even though it also suggests that the social dimension of the teams with respect to the extra-professionals relations that are developed as well as the role that the organization itself has motivating the groups are crucial issues to which priority must be given.

Considering the results of this research and the literature available, is it possible to conclude that sport teams are in fact special teams, mainly due to its human relations dimension (Bouet, 1966), the simplicity of the objectives defined, and the strong common identity that exists among its members (Carron and Hausenblas, 1998). Simultaneously, sport teams can be viewed as a clear example of how people should behave in group situations and what a team should do to succeed.

Finally, it remains to note that this study has two significant limitations: only male teams were analyzed and, since football is the main sport in Portugal, it would be interesting the inclusion of a football team.

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VIII. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Boa tarde. O meu nome é Bárbara Gonçalves. Estou neste momento a desenvolver a minha tese de mestrado na área dos Estudos Organizacionais. O objectivo é tentar perceber quais os factores chave que influenciam o desempenho de uma equipa. Como vou estudar o caso específico das equipas desportivas a sua experiência profissional enquanto atleta e membro de uma equipa faz de si o candidato ideal para a minha pesquisa. A entrevista vai durar cerca de 15 minutos.

The Team

- O que é para si uma verdadeira equipa?
- Quais os factores que influenciam o sucesso de uma equipa?
- Quais os pontos fortes da sua equipa?

Leadership

- Como define o papel do treinador relativamente ao sucesso do grupo?
- Quais as características que mais admira num treinador?

- Que estilo de liderança e comunicação é utilizado pelo treinador?

Interactions

- Que tipo de relações existem na equipa e como as caracteriza?
- Como define “espírito de equipa”?
- Que tipo de comunicação existe dentro da equipa?

Individual Motivations

- O que significa para si a equipa?
- Na sua opinião, de que forma o seu trabalho é visto pelos outros elementos da equipa, treinadores e direcção?
- O que o motiva mais?

Para terminar, gostaria que desse o exemplo de experiência marcante que tenha tido na sua carreira e que enalteça aquilo que deve ser uma verdadeira equipa.

Obrigada!

Appendix 2 – Teams’ Profiles

Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira (Ciclismo)

The oldest team of the international peloton only obtained his first major trophy in 2008 when David Blanco won the 70th Tour of Portugal. In 2009 the same rider repeated the victory after the decommissioning of the initial winner. The CCT was also the winner of the classification by teams.

Futebol Clube “Os Belenenses” (Futsal)

The futsal started in *Belenenses* in 2003/2004, season in which won the National Champion of the 3rd Division. In the following season (2004/2005), the team played and won the national championship of the 2nd Division. During 4 years in the 1st Division, it has always qualified for the group that discuss the title (play-off), having obtained the 2nd place in the last two years.

Seleção Nacional de Portugal (Rugby)

In 1935 was played the first international game of rugby. Although Portugal has not had for a long time very successful in this sport, in recent years replicated successful results. Despite being an amateur team with limited resources, it won the European Nations Tournament in 2003-2004 and

participated in the final phase of World Cup Rugby 2007.

Sport Lisboa e Benfica (Futsal)

The *Sport Lisboa e Benfica* has a professional futsal team since 2001. In eight years, the club won five National Championships, four Cups of Portugal and four Super Cups. Since its formation in 2001, the team was never ranked lower than second place in the National Championship.

Sporting Clube de Espinho (Voleibol)

Club with great tradition in volleyball, has 61 uninterrupted presences in the 1st division of the National League. In the 2008/2009 season the team won the 3rd title of national champion in 4 years and the 16th in its history, being the Portuguese team with more titles won.

Appendix 3 – Research Participants’ Profiles

	Age	Position	Club (Futsal)	Seasons in the team*	Duration	Date
1	25	Trepador	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	1	20 min	5.10.09
2	35	Completo	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	1	17 min	5.10.09
3	34	Completo	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	3	13 min	5.10.09
4	34	Completo	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	4	19 min	5.10.09
5	26	Trepador	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	5	10 min	5.10.09
6	40	Treinador	Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira	5	8 min	5.10.09

	Age	Position	Club (Futsal)	Seasons in the team*	Duration	Date
7	28	Ala	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	0	14 min	9.10.09
8	25	Fixo / Ala	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	2	19 min	9.10.09
9	25	Guarda-Redes	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	2	16 min	12.10.09
10	26	Ala	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	2	20 min	12.10.09
11	29	Ala	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	2	17 min	14.10.09
12	52	Treinador	Futebol Clube Os Belenenses	3	12 min	14.10.09

	Age	Position	Club (Futsal)	Seasons in the team**	Duration	Date
13	27	Talonador	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	-	11 min	29.10.09
14	27	Ponta	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	-	13 min	29.10.09
15	26	Abertura	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	-	14 min	29.10.09
16	31	Defesa	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	-	8 min	6.11.09

17	26	3ª Linha	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	-	10 min	6.11.09
18	39	Treinador	Seleção Nacional de Rugby	8	15 min	6.11.09

	Age	Position	Club (Futsal)	Seasons in the team*	Duration	Date
19	30	Ala	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	2	9 min	10.11.09
20	27	Pivot	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	0	12 min	10.11.09
21	37	Guarda-Redes	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	7	9 min	10.11.09
22	32	Fixo	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	3	10 min	21.11.09
23	31	Universal	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	3	12 min	21.11.09
24	39	Coach	Sport Lisboa e Benfica	5	18 min	21.11.09

	Age	Position	Club (Futsal)	Seasons in the team*	Duration	Date
25	26	Distribuidor	Sporting Clube de Espinho	0	13 min	17.11.09
26	27	Zona 4	Sporting Clube de Espinho	1	15 min	17.11.09
27	32	Libero	Sporting Clube de Espinho	3	17 min	17.11.09
28	38	Distribuidor	Sporting Clube de Espinho	4	13 min	17.11.09
29	29	Zona 4	Sporting Clube de Espinho	3	14 min	17.11.09
30	49	Treinador	Sporting Clube de Espinho	1	25 min	17.11.09

* Completed and uninterrupted seasons

** The group of athletes called changes from game to game, but all the athletes were the World Cup of 2007.

Appendix 4 – Citations' Identification

Each respondent's citation is identified according to a coding process: (Age, Club).

Ex. (24, FCB) – refers to a futsal player of Belenenses, who is 24 years old.

Ex. (27, SLB) – refers to a futsal player of Benfica, who is 27 years old.

Ex. (24, SNR) – refers to a Rugby player of Seleção Nacional, who is 24 years old.

Ex. (27, SCE) – refers to a volleyball player of Sporting de Espinho, who is 27 years old.

Ex. (24, CCT) – refers to a cyclist of Clube de Ciclismo de Tavira, who is 24 years old.

Regarding the coaches, each citation is identified as follows: (C, Club)